
THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF UTAH

EARL LESTON BARNES,

Plaintiff,

v.

STATE OF UTAH et al.,

Defendants.

**MEMORANDUM DECISION
& ORDER TO CURE
DEFICIENT COMPLAINT**

Case No. 2:22-CV-596-RJS

Chief District Judge Robert J. Shelby

In this *pro se* prisoner civil-rights action, *see* 42 U.S.C.S. § 1983 (2023),¹ having screened Plaintiff's Complaint, (ECF No. 5), under its statutory review function,² the Court orders Plaintiff to file an amended complaint to cure deficiencies before further pursuing claims.

¹The federal statute creating a "civil action for deprivation of rights" reads, in pertinent part:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory . . . , subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress, except that in any action brought against a judicial officer for an act or omission taken in such officer's judicial capacity, injunctive relief shall not be granted unless a declaratory decree was violated or declaratory relief was unavailable.

42 U.S.C.S. § 1983 (2023).

²The screening statute reads:

(a) Screening.—The court shall review . . . a complaint in a civil action in which a prisoner seeks redress from a governmental entity or officer or employee of a governmental entity.

(b) Grounds for dismissal.—On review, the court shall identify cognizable claims or dismiss the complaint, or any portion of the complaint, if the complaint—

(1) is frivolous, malicious, or fails to state a claim upon which relief may be granted; or

(2) seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief.

28 U.S.C.S. § 1915A (2023).

COMPLAINT'S DEFICIENCIES

Complaint:

- (a) does not acknowledge the applicability of Eleventh Amendment immunity. (See below.)
- (b) names a defendant only in the text, not in the Complaint's heading also, as required.
- (c) by naming counties as defendants, tries to state § 1983 claims in violation of municipal-liability doctrine. (See below.)
- (d) possibly inappropriately alleges civil-rights violations on a *respondeat-superior* theory. (See below.)
- (e) possibly states crimes by Defendants must be redressed; however, a federal civil-rights is not the proper place to address criminal behavior.
- (f) does not properly affirmatively link the defendant to specific civil-rights violations. (See below.)
- (g) possibly improperly names judge as defendant, apparently without considering judicial immunity. (See below.)
- (h) possibly improperly names a prosecutor as a defendant, apparently without considering prosecutorial immunity. (See below.)
- (i) improperly names as defendants individuals providing representation for Plaintiff as public defenders; such attorneys are not state actors under § 1983. (See below.)
- (j) improperly alleges constitutional violations occurring in another state--e.g., Arizona. *See* 28 U.S.C.S. § 1391(b) (2023) (providing civil case may be filed in “(1) a judicial district in which any defendant resides, if all defendants are residents of the State in which the district is located; [or] (2) a judicial district in which a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claim occurred”).
- (k) asserts claims possibly invalidated by the rule in *Heck*. (See below.)
- (l) possibly asserts claims attacking the validity of conviction and sentence, which should, if at all, be brought in habeas-corpus petition, not a civil-rights complaint.
- (m) does not adequately state a claim of improper medical treatment. (See below.)

GUIDANCE FOR PLAINTIFF

Rule 8 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure requires a complaint to contain "(1) a short and plain statement of the grounds for the court's jurisdiction . . . ; (2) a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief; and (3) a demand for the relief sought." Rule 8's requirements mean to guarantee "that defendants enjoy fair notice of what the claims against them are and the grounds upon which they rest." *TV Commc'ns Network, Inc. v ESPN, Inc.*, 767 F. Supp. 1062, 1069 (D. Colo. 1991).

Pro se litigants are not excused from meeting these minimal pleading demands. "This is so because a pro se plaintiff requires no special legal training to recount the facts surrounding his alleged injury, and he must provide such facts if the court is to determine whether he makes out a claim on which relief can be granted." *Hall v. Bellmon*, 935 F.2d 1106, 1110 (10th Cir. 1991). Moreover, it is improper for the Court "to assume the role of advocate for a pro se litigant." *Id.* Thus, the Court cannot "supply additional facts, [or] construct a legal theory for plaintiff that assumes facts that have not been pleaded." *Dunn v. White*, 880 F.2d 1188, 1197 (10th Cir. 1989).

Plaintiff should consider these general points before filing an amended complaint:

(i) The revised complaint must stand entirely on its own and shall not refer to, or incorporate by reference, any portion of the original complaint. *See Murray v. Archambo*, 132 F.3d 609, 612 (10th Cir. 1998) (stating amended complaint supersedes original). The amended complaint may also not be added to after it is filed without moving for amendment.³

³ The rule on amending a pleading reads:

(a) Amendments Before Trial.

(1) Amending as a Matter of Course. A party may amend its pleading once as a matter of course within:

(A) 21 days after serving it, or

(B) if the pleading is one to which a responsive pleading is

(ii) The complaint must clearly state what each defendant--typically, a named government employee--did to violate Plaintiff's civil rights. *See Bennett v. Passic*, 545 F.2d 1260, 1262-63 (10th Cir. 1976) (stating personal participation of each named defendant is essential allegation in civil-rights action). "To state a claim, a complaint must 'make clear exactly *who* is alleged to have done *what* to *whom*.'" *Stone v. Albert*, 338 F. App'x 757, 759 (10th Cir. 2009) (unpublished) (emphasis in original) (quoting *Robbins v. Oklahoma*, 519 F.3d 1242, 1250 (10th Cir. 2008)).

(iii) Each cause of action, together with the facts and citations that directly support it, should be stated separately. Plaintiff should be as brief as possible while still using enough words to fully explain the "who," "what," "where," "when," and "why" of each claim. *Robbins*, 519 F.3d at 1248 ("The [*Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly*] Court was particularly critical of complaints that 'mentioned no specific, time, place, or person involved in the alleged [claim].' [550 U.S. 544, 565] n.10 (2007). Given such a complaint, 'a defendant seeking to respond to plaintiff's conclusory allegations . . . would have little idea where to begin.' *Id.*").

(iv) Plaintiff may not name an individual as a defendant based solely on supervisory position. *See Mitchell v. Maynard*, 80 F.2d 1433, 1441 (10th Cir. 1996) (stating supervisory status alone does not support § 1983 liability).

required, 21 days after service of a responsive pleading or 21 days after service of a motion under Rule 12(b), (e), or (f), whichever is earlier.

(2) Other Amendments. In all other cases, a party may amend its pleadings only with the opposing party's written consent or the court's leave. The court should freely give leave when justice so requires.

Fed. R. Civ. P. 15.

(v) Grievance denial alone with no connection to “violation of constitutional rights alleged by plaintiff, does not establish personal participation under § 1983.” *Gallagher v. Shelton*, 587 F.3d 1063, 1069 (10th Cir. 2009).

(vi) “No action shall be brought with respect to prison conditions under . . . Federal law, by a prisoner confined in any jail, prison, or other correctional facility until such administrative remedies as are available are exhausted.” 42 U.S.C.S. § 1997e(a) (2023). However, Plaintiff need not include grievance details in his complaint. Exhaustion of administrative remedies is an affirmative defense that must be raised by Defendants. *Jones v. Bock*, 549 U.S. 199, 216 (2007).

• Eleventh Amendment Immunity

Eleventh Amendment sovereign immunity bars suits for money damages against states, state agencies, and state officers in their official capacities. *See Tarrant Reg'l Water Dist. v. Sevenoaks*, 545 F.3d 906, 911 (10th Cir. 2008); *Couser v. Gay*, 959 F.3d 1018, 1022 (10th Cir. 2020). While sovereign immunity bars damages claims against state actors in their official capacity, the *Ex parte Young* doctrine provides an exception for plaintiffs who (1) allege “an ongoing violation of federal law” and (2) “seek[] relief properly characterized as prospective.” *Williams v. Utah Dep't of Corr.*, 928 F.3d 1209, 1214 (10th Cir. 2019) (quoting *Verizon Md. Inc. v. Pub. Serv. Comm'n*, 535 U.S. 635, 645 (2002)). *See generally Ex parte Young*, 209 U.S. 123 (1908).

Chilcoat v. San Juan Cnty., 41 F.4th 1196, 1213-14 (10th Cir. 2022); *see also Buck v. Utah Labor Comm'n*, 73 F. App'x 345, 347 (10th Cir. 2003) (holding Eleventh Amendment shields State of Utah and its employees in official capacity from claims alleging violations of § 1983).

• Local Government Liability

To establish liability of local-government entities, such as counties, under § 1983, “a plaintiff must show (1) the existence of a municipal custom or policy and (2) a direct causal link between the custom or policy and the violation alleged.” *Jenkins v. Wood*, 81 F.3d 988, 993-94

(10th Cir. 1996) (citing *City of Canton v. Harris*, 489 U.S. 378, 385 (1989)). Local governmental entities may not be held liable under § 1983 based on the doctrine of *respondeat superior*. See *Cannon v. City and County of Denver*, 998 F.2d 867, 877 (10th Cir. 1993); see also *Monell v. Dep't of Soc. Servs. of N.Y.*, 436 U.S. 658, 694 (1978).

Plaintiff has not so far established a direct causal link between his alleged injuries and any custom or policy of a county. Thus, the Court concludes that Plaintiff's complaint, as it stands, fails to state claims against any counties.

• *Respondeat Superior*

The Supreme Court holds that, in asserting a § 1983 claim against a government agent in their individual capacity, "a plaintiff must plead that each Government-official defendant, through the official's own individual actions, has violated the Constitution." *Ashcroft v. Iqbal*, 556 U.S. 662 676 (2009). Consequently, there is no *respondeat superior* liability under § 1983. See *Iqbal*, 556 U.S. at 676 ("Because vicarious liability is inapplicable to *Bivens* and § 1983 suits, a plaintiff must plead that each Government-official defendant, through the official's own individual actions, has violated the Constitution."); *Bd. of Cty. Comm'rs v. Brown*, 520 U.S. 397, 403 (1997). Entities may not be held liable on the sole ground of an employer-employee relationship with a claimed tortfeasor. See *Monell v. Dep't of Soc. Servs. of N.Y.*, 436 U.S. 658, 689 (1978). Supervisors are considered liable for their own unconstitutional or illegal policies only, and not for employees' tortious acts. See *Barney v. Pulsipher*, 143 F.3d 1299, 1307-08 (10th Cir. 1998).

• Affirmative Link

[A] plaintiff who brings a constitutional claim under § 1983 can't obtain relief without first satisfying the personal-participation

requirement. That is, the plaintiff must demonstrate the defendant "personally participated in the alleged constitutional violation" at issue. *Vasquez v. Davis*, 882 F.3d 1270, 1275 (10th Cir. 2018). Indeed, because § 1983 is a "vehicle[]" for imposing personal liability on government officials, we have stressed the need for careful attention to particulars, especially in lawsuits involving multiple defendants." *Pahls v. Thomas*, 718 F.3d 1210, 1225 (10th Cir. 2013); *see also Robbins v. Oklahoma*, 519 F.3d 1242, 1250 (10th Cir. 2008) (explaining that when plaintiff brings § 1983 claims against multiple defendants, "it is particularly important . . . that the complaint make clear exactly *who* is alleged to have done *what* to *whom*"); *Tonkovich v. Kan. Bd. of Regents*, 159 F.3d 504, 532-33 (10th Cir. 1998)) (holding that district court's analysis of plaintiff's § 1983 claims was "infirm" where district court "lump[ed]" together plaintiff's claims against multiple defendants--"despite the fact that each of the defendants had different powers and duties and took different actions with respect to [plaintiff]"--and "wholly failed to identify specific actions taken by particular defendants that could form the basis of [a constitutional] claim").

Estate of Roemer v. Johnson, 764 F. App'x 784, 790-91 (10th Cir. 2019).

"A plaintiff's failure to satisfy this requirement will trigger swift and certain dismissal." *Id.* at 790 n.5. Indeed, the Tenth Circuit has "gone so far as to suggest that failure to satisfy the personal-participation requirement will not only justify dismissal for failure to state a claim; it will render the plaintiff's claim frivolous." *Id.*

• **Judicial Immunity**

It is well settled that judges "are absolutely immune from suit unless they act in 'clear absence of all jurisdiction,' meaning that even erroneous or malicious acts are not proper bases for § 1983 claims." *Segler v. Felfam Ltd. P'ship*, 324 F. App'x 742, 743 (10th Cir. 2009) (unpublished) (quoting *Stump v. Sparkman*, 435 U.S. 349, 356-57 (1978)). The judges here very well may have been acting in a judicial capacity in presiding over Plaintiff's case(s); if so, such

actions are entitled to absolute immunity. *See Doran v. Sanchez*, 289 F. App'x 332, 332 (10th Cir. 2008) (unpublished).

• Prosecutorial Immunity

Prosecutors acting within the scope of their duties enjoys absolute immunity from suit under § 1983. *Imbler v. Pachtman*, 424 U.S. 409, 424 (1976). The prosecutors' acts, as alleged by Plaintiff, apparently relate to advocacy in court. Prosecutor defendants therefore may be entitled to absolute prosecutorial immunity from this lawsuit.

• State Actor

"[T]he Supreme Court has stated that 'a public defender does not act under color of state law when performing a lawyer's traditional functions as counsel to a defendant in a criminal proceeding.'" *Garza v. Bandy*, 293 F. App'x 565, 566 (10th Cir. 2008) (unpublished) (quoting *Polk County v. Dodson*, 454 U.S. 312, 325 (1981)). And, "'though the defective performance of defense counsel may cause the trial process to deprive an accused person of his liberty in an unconstitutional manner, the lawyer who may be responsible for the unconstitutional state action does not himself act under color of state law within the meaning of § 1983.'" *Id.* (quoting *Briscoe v. LaHue*, 460 U.S. 325, 329 n. 6 (1983)).

• Heck

Plaintiff's claims appear to include some allegations that if true may invalidate Plaintiff's conviction or sentence, if Plaintiff has been convicted and sentenced. "In *Heck*, the Supreme Court explained that a § 1983 action that would impugn the validity of a plaintiff's [incarceration] cannot be maintained unless the [basis for incarceration] has been reversed on direct appeal or impaired by collateral proceedings." *Nichols v. Baer*, 315 F. App'x 738, 739

(10th Cir. 2009) (unpublished) (citing *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477, 486-87 (1994)). *Heck* keeps litigants "from using a § 1983 action, with its more lenient pleading rules, to challenge their conviction or sentence without complying with the more stringent exhaustion requirements for habeas actions." *Butler v. Compton*, 482 F.3d 1277, 1279 (10th Cir. 2007) (citation omitted). *Heck* clarifies that "civil tort actions are not appropriate vehicles for challenging the validity of outstanding criminal judgments." 512 U.S. at 486.

Plaintiff argues that Plaintiff's constitutional rights were breached in a way that may attack Petitioner's very imprisonment. *Heck* requires that, if a plaintiff requests § 1983 damages, this Court must decide whether judgment for the plaintiff would unavoidably imply that Plaintiff's incarceration is invalid. *Id.* at 487. Here, it appears it may on some claims. If this Court were to conclude that Plaintiff's constitutional rights were violated in a prejudicial manner, it would be stating that Plaintiff's incarceration was not valid. Thus, the involved claims "must be dismissed unless the plaintiff can demonstrate that the conviction or sentence has already been invalidated." *Id.* This has possibly not happened and may result in dismissal of such claims.

• Inadequate Medical Treatment

The Eighth Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment requires prison officials to "provide humane conditions of confinement" including "adequate . . . medical care." *Craig v. Eberly*, 164 F.3d 490, 495 (10th Cir. 1998)) (quoting *Barney v. Pulsipher*, 143 F.3d 1299, 1310 (10th Cir. 1998)). To state a cognizable claim under the Eighth Amendment for failure to provide proper medical care, "a prisoner must allege acts or omissions *sufficiently harmful* to evidence deliberate indifference to serious medical needs." *Olson v. Stotts*, 9 F.3d 1475, 1477 (10th Cir. 1993) (emphasis in original) (quoting *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 106 (1976)).

Any Eighth Amendment claim must be evaluated under objective and subjective prongs:

(1) “Was the deprivation sufficiently serious?” And, if so, (2) “Did the officials act with a sufficiently culpable state of mind?” *Wilson v. Seiter*, 501 U.S. 294, 298 (1991).

Under the objective prong, a medical need is “sufficiently serious . . . if it is one that has been diagnosed by a physician as mandating treatment or one that is so obvious that even a lay person would easily recognize the necessity for a doctor’s attention.” *Sealock*, 218 F.3d at 1209 (citations & quotation marks omitted).

The subjective component requires the plaintiff to show that prison officials were consciously aware that the prisoner faced a substantial risk of harm and wantonly disregarded the risk “by failing to take reasonable measures to abate it.” *Farmer v. Brennan*, 511 U.S. 825, 847 (1994). “[T]he ‘inadvertent failure to provide adequate medical care’ tantamount to negligence does not satisfy the deliberate indifference standard.” *Sparks v. Singh*, 690 F. App’x 598, 604 (10th Cir. 2017) (unpublished) (quoting *Estelle v. Gamble*, 429 U.S. 97, 105–06 (1976)). Furthermore, “a prisoner who merely disagrees with a diagnosis or a prescribed course of treatment does not state a constitutional violation.” *Perkins v. Kan. Dep’t of Corrs.*, 165 F.3d 803, 811 10th Cir. 1999); *see also Gee v. Pacheco*, 627 F.3d 1178, 1192 (10th Cir. 2010) (“Disagreement with a doctor’s particular method of treatment, without more, does not rise to the level of an Eighth Amendment violation.”).

ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that:

(1) Plaintiff must within thirty days cure the complaint's deficiencies noted above by filing a document entitled, "Amended Complaint," that does not refer to or include any other document.

(2) The Clerk's Office shall mail Plaintiff the Pro Se Litigant Guide with a blank-form civil-rights complaint and habeas-corpus petition, which Plaintiff must use if wishing to pursue potential claims further.

(3) If Plaintiff fails to timely cure the above deficiencies according to this Order's instructions, this action will be dismissed without further notice.

(4) The amended complaint shall not include any claims (a) occurring past the date of the Complaint, filed October 4, 2022, and (b) outside the allegations of transactions and events contained in the Complaint, (ECF No. 5). The Court will not address any such new claims or outside allegations, which will be dismissed. If Plaintiff wishes to raise other claims and allegations, Plaintiff may do so only in a new complaint in a new case. If an amended complaint is filed, the Court will screen it for dismissal or an order effecting service upon valid defendants who are affirmatively linked to valid claims.

(5) Plaintiff shall not try to serve the amended complaint on Defendants; instead, the Court will perform its screening function and determine itself whether the amended complaint warrants service or dismissal. No motion for service of process is needed. *See* 28 U.S.C.S. § 1915(d) (2023) ("The officers of the court shall issue and serve all process, and perform all duties in [*in forma pauperis*] cases."). All defendants and claims should be included in an

amended complaint, if filed, and will not be treated further by the Court unless properly included.

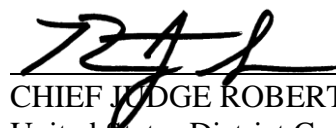
(6) Plaintiff must tell the Court of any address change and timely comply with Court orders. *See* D. Utah Civ. R. 83-1.3(e) ("In all cases, counsel and parties appearing *pro se* must notify the clerk's office immediately of any change in address, email address, or telephone number."). Failure to do so may result in this action's dismissal for failure to prosecute. *See* Fed. R. Civ. P. 41(b) ("If the plaintiff fails to prosecute or to comply with these rules or a court order, a defendant may move to dismiss the action or any claim against it. Unless the dismissal order states otherwise, a dismissal under this subdivision (b) and any dismissal not under this rule--except one for lack of jurisdiction, improper venue, or failure to join a party under Rule 19--operates as an adjudication on the merits.").

(7) Time extensions are disfavored, though reasonable extensions may be granted. Any motion for time extension must be filed no later than **fourteen days** before the deadline to be extended.

(8) No direct communication is to take place with any judge. All relevant information, letters, documents, and papers, labeled with case number, are to be directed to the Clerk of Court.

DATED this 26th day of October, 2023.

BY THE COURT:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. J. Shelby', is written over a horizontal line.

CHIEF JUDGE ROBERT J. SHELBY
United States District Court